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ABSTRACT

This paper reports the reform of preschool education in Germany which began at the end of the 1960s as a curriculum reform and within 10 years had resulted in the reorganization of all kindergartens. The discussion describes features of reformed kindergartens, offers examples of educational work in reformed kindergartens, and explores the situational approach as a frame of reference for curriculum development and kindergarten reform. Concluding sections focus on experiences with the situational approach in non-European countries and, briefly, on reform as a process. Emphasis is given to the fact that curriculum development can be an impetus not only for changes in educational work but also for changes in the institutional patterns of kindergartens. (RH)

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Preschool Curriculum Development and Kindergarten Education Based on Life Situations: German, Asian and Latin American Experiences

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this paper is to report the reform of preschool education in Germany. This reform began at the end of the 1960s as a curriculum reform; ten years later, it had developed to the point that all kindergardens had been reorganised.

A few pertinent scenes are presented at the beginning to provide insights into the educational practice involved. To allow these scenes to be properly understood, features of reformed kindergartens will be provided and explained later on in greater detail. The purpose of this elaboration is to clarify the fact that curriculum development can be an impetus not only for changes in educational work but also in the institutional patterns of kindergartens. This paper ends with presentation of experiences which have been gained in the application of this reform concept in developing countries.

FEATURES OF REFORMED KINDERGARTENS

In the mid-1960s, a discussion on preschool education took place with focus on two accentuations. Firstly, the theory that aptitude was based on hereditary and biological factors came under fire. Instead, emphasis was placed on the relationship between aptitude and education. The benefits of supporting an early childhood education were stressed, especially for children from socially disadvantaged sections of the population.

Secondly, the traditional concept of kindergarten was discussed. Most of them were politically active middle-class parents. The traditional concept was accused of being too authoritarian and of leaving children in

an artificially sheltered sphere – of isolating them from real life situations and depriving them from meaningful educational offerings.

Following these discussions, the whole area of preschool activity – i.e. kindergarten for three to five-year olds was integrated more extensively into the educational system and was quantitatively expanded. In 1970, there were facilities to accommodate only one-third of the children in this age group in Germany but today 80% of the three of five-year olds are provided for.

In numerous experimental model programs oriented along the concept of action research, new qualities of educational endeavour developed with strong and active participation on the part of the preschool teachers. Throughout the years of this reform, contrast was made to the earlier, competitive approaches which demonstrated the following:

(1) Some parts of the curricula of primary schools were moved up earlier in the child's education.
(2) Variables of personality described by the psychology of child development, primarily in terms of the cognitive, had been formulated as goals of learning – a development which led to corresponding training of isolated factors.
(3) Guided by science-oriented propaedutical intentions, the attempt was made to impart basic concepts and methods from scientific disciplines to children of preschool age. This followed the curriculum theory of 'structures of disciplines' as developed by Jerome Bruner.

Criticism of these approaches was primarily to the effect that they were far too removed from the children's reality of life, tending towards school-like training programmes.

At the end of the 1970s, the concept that real life situations of children should be the focal point of education stimulation developed jointly by educators and scientists in the Federal Republic of Germany was generally accepted. This concept is accordingly termed 'the situation approach'. This situational approach has since become the characteristic feature of kindergartens in Germany. It still sets the standards of reform and it can be briefly defined by the following eight features:

(1) The processes of learning and experiences of children should relate to their life situations. Children of different social backgrounds and with varied histories of learning should be encouraged to handle life situations of the present and the near future in a self-determined and appropriate way.
(2) Of primary importance is social learning. Learning is related to facts and the acquisition of knowledge and skills is subordinated to social learning and is related to a social context whenever possible.

(3) The tendency towards working in a group of mixed ages should be given preference over the organising of learning in a homogeneous age group since the passing on of experiences is stronger between children of different ages, and hierarchical situations of learning and teaching can be reduced in importance in such a way.

(4) Parents and other adults participate in the educational work of the kindergarten. Parents are affected by the situations of their children; furthermore, they can introduce practical life skills into the planning and realisation of educational activities. At the same time, the parents themselves can learn – especially if the kindergarten takes into due consideration their situations regarding content, time, and organisation.

(5) Children can participate in the planning of the educational processes. The relationship between adults and children resembles little of a classical teaching/learning relationship in that it is rather an experiential and communicational process carried out by adults and children alike. The participants can both learn *and* teach, and the teachers do not assume the exclusive role of experts.

(6) Learning for life situations also refers to learning in fields of action outside the kindergarten. Locations of learning are explored in the community in terms of projects carried out and adults from the social surroundings involve themselves in projects inside and outside the kindergarten. Reformed kindergartens are seminal points for future community or city-district centres.

(7) Everyday planning in the kindergarten is more open and is less ritualised than before the reform. The daily schedule is acted out less according to some fixed pattern of, say, playtime/breakfast together/structured activity/lunch and rest/playtime. Instead, the day is organised more in regard to *situations* and is oriented towards small groups. Work is done largely in teams and on intergroup levels.

(8) In the outfitting of reformed kindergartens, the appearance is one which is more stimulatory, more extensively arranged by individual initiative and more homely. Division of function is partly removed by converting thoroughfare zones into areas of other use for the children. The reorganisation of group rooms toward zones of learning and experience resembles principles of arrangement found in classes with open education.

The following can be listed as the essential features of the situation approach in preschool education:

(1) learning for life situations;
(2) the cultivation of the connection between social and fact-oriented learning;
(3) mixed age groups;

(4) the pedagogical participation of parents and other adults in reference to a learning situation bridging generations;
(5) a changed relationship between those teaching and those learning;
(6) community-oriented work;
(7) open planning; and
(8) the design of the kindergarten as a vital space.

This situation approach has broadened over the years of its elaboration and expansion, from a plan approach for preschool curriculum development to a frame of reference of a reformed work context in the kindergarten.

EXAMPLES OF EDUCATIONAL WORK IN REFORMED KINDERGARTENS

In its heyday, such reform in kindergartens spred like wildfire in Germany. A kindergarten teacher who had an experience would report it to others. They, in turn, did not imitate but rather developed something new out of it. Thousands acted in this way. Although the scientists who did the follow-up research used the term 'curriculum development' for this process – which in fact carried all the signs of a compaign – it actually had nothing to do with the taxonomies of a Benjamin Bloom or with any measuring and classifying done by children, as promoted by Jerome Bruner. Rather, this reform dealt with *the life situations* of children. And this all took place in the social surroundings of the kindergarten, with parents and other adults from the neighbourhood.

The development of this type of curriculum oriented itself to key situations of children, and it documented the many and various educational experiences of the adults in the preparation of children to master such situations. That is why this curriculum development has become an attempt to document the successes gained over the years–in terms of curriculum elements which, in the Federal Republic of Germany, are called 'didactic units.' The most extensive and important of such a curriculum is entitled *Social Learning*, a text of over 2000 pages, hundreds of documentary photos, situational films for children and tape recordings. It includes reports made by teams of preschool teachers from the German Youth Institute as well as teachers from nine of the eleven of German Federal States. It contains 28 didactic units for 28 key situations of German children.

The titles of these didactic units reflect the situations to which they relate. The following are given as examples:

Children in the hospital (addressing children's fears of disease and hospitalisation)
Commercial advertising
Television

Death
What my parents do during the day
Getting lost in the city
Living at home
Weekend
Children big and little
Birth and tenderness
Boys and girls (addressing the problem of the fixed roles of the sexes)
Foreign children (about 4½ million people from other countries live in the Federal Republic of Germany – most of them are foreign workers who will stay permanently in Germany with their families)
Handicapped children
Children and old people (addressing the often interrupted contact between children and the elderly)
Garbage
Children entering school

The following is an attempt to demonstrate some incidents and situational themes which were implemented in the kindergarten:

Situation: 'Handicapped'

A woman passes a kindergarten in her wheelchair. A few children who are looking out the window laugh at her. The woman turns around and talks to the kindergarten teacher. She offers to play with the children and show them what it means to be handicapped and to have to sit in a wheelchair. The children play: How does it feel to be unable to move your legs, to see, to hear? For several days, the woman plays with the children. Later, the children discover that they have no handicapped child in their group. But there is one in the neighbourhood. So children and teacher establish contact with that family and not much later, this handicapped child is accepted into the group.

Situation: 'Getting Lost'

In a department store, a child has lost his mother and panics. In the kindergarten, projects can be planned to prepare the children for the 'getting lost' situation.

Project 1: A group of children goes into a department store and discusses whom they can ask or turn to for help when they get lost. The children hide behind some counters while one child steps forward to ask for the way to the information booth. There, over the loudspeaker, he is announced as having been lost.

Project 2: Whoever gets lost should know the number of his family's house or kindergarten and should know how to use the phone. This is a good occasion to learn numbers. 'But what can you do when you cannot

use the public phone booth by yourself, and when there is no change?" There are telephone booths in the underpass to the main train station. This time, children and adults hide behind a billboard and individual children take the lead. They ask passers-by for change and for help with the telephone. Among the remarks of the passers-by are 'You just want to buy chewing gum.' 'Wait, I'll take you to the police.' 'I'll lift you and you can hold the receiver yourself.' The children exchange their experiences.

Project 3: Here, parents and teachers help children simulate 'getting lost and finding the way home again' situations. Parents play the role of passers-by. Children, in groups of two, are assigned the task of getting from an unknown location 'A' to a kindergarten 'B', unfamiliar to them. At every 150 meters or so, a passer-by with a newspaper is stationed as a sign of recognition. The passers-by are particularly observant at street crossings or at turnings.

Situation: 'Fear of Medical Treatment

When a group dental checkup is announced, no child wants to go as all of them are afraid. A kindergarten teacher asks a friend if he will act the role of a dentist. She brings an electric tooth brush (the drill), dental models, bowls, sponges and mirrors. The friend comes dressed in a white coat. The children, waiting in a row of chairs, say that they want the teacher to be treated first. After this, they then want the 'dentist' to be treated by the teacher. When the 'dentist' comply, the children agree to take their turns in the dentist chair. The next day, they go to the real dentist without hesitation and continue playing in the waiting room. The dentist plays along willingly – only the dental assistant is irritated by the confusion.

Situation: 'Children and Old People'

Conversations about the loss of relationships with old people take place in the kindergarten. Two teachers telephone a home for the elderly to make an appointment for the children's visit. The visit turns out to be a shock for the home is more a place for the dying. Many of the elderly are lying in beds and some are hardly able to respond. The children and educators are moved by the sight. As a result of this experience, old people are being invited to the kindergarten. Grandmothers come; they tell stories, show old photo albums, bring the tiddlywinks game. There is even a party in the old style with tango music and raspberry juice as make-believe champagne.

Another kindergarten was broken in and toys were destroyed. Contact was again made with an old folks' home but this time, the old people who were craftsmen were asked whether they would like to help the children to repair the toys. Some were willing. The children learned to repair the destroyed toys. The old people learned, with some help, to include the children in the work.

Situation: 'Commercial Advertising'

A boy joins the group claims, 'My Chiquita banana is the best'. (Chiquita is a brand name for bananas with a little blue sticker.) The next day, all the children brought Chiquita bananas except for a girl who had a banana without a sticker. When she was laughed at, she accused her mother of being bad because she bought a cheap banana and not a Chiquita. A few days later, the teacher brought along bananas of different origins. Among them was a Chiquita banana without a sticker. The teacher asked the original boastful boy how he could recognise the Chiquita banana. He replied it was by size. She placed the bananas in front of him. In selecting the banana, he picked the wrong one. Then he said he could recognise the Chiquita by its taste. He and the other children tasted the bananas. Again the boy could not find the Chiquita banana. Then prices were discussed with the aid of a calculator. The result was, 'If I buy cheaper bananas, I can get many more'.

Situation: 'Foreign Children and Families'

Mima, an Italian child, complains that she has to speak German whereas the other children do not have to speak Italian. A game 'packing the suitcase, Italian style' is played. Mima plays the teacher and the others guess the objects on the covered cards. They learn the Italian terms before they pack their cards into the suitcases.

Advent season. Where do foreigners go home to during advent? A Spanish–German group of children goes to the main train station with a microphone and maps. A Spanish father comes along to translate. They ask the waiting people: 'Where is home for you?' 'How long does it take for you to get there?' 'Do you have children and photographs of them?' A Moroccan, standing alone, is surprised and touched. The children help the foreigners to carry their luggage into the train compartments. Addresses are exchanged. The Moroccan sends them a postcard from his home and later visits them in their kindergarten.

Situation: 'Children in an Unfriendly Kindergarten'

The building of an urban German kindergarten of the early 1970s is a prima example of clinical dreariness with functional and thoroughfare spaces carefully separated. The rooms are flat boxes built without much care of attention. The group rooms consist of a corner with dolls, a corner for building things and cupboards with locks along the wall. In the centre, there is a large table with chairs placed around it. One day, the teachers begin turning their kindergarten upside down. They are tired of putting their children, ***en masse***, through their paces like animal trainers. They do not feel at home in this building.

First of all, together with the parents, they changed the group rooms into an area resembling a labyrinth. Whoever enters the door today finds numerous nooks and crannies, transversely placed shelves, playhouses and

caves. There are many items of junk, all kinds of material which children are free to take, a lot of stuff which is homemade or picked up somewhere for nothing. Everything is accessible at any time: the costume box, the make-up chest, the old record player, the theatre seat, junked clocks, radios and wagons. The children spread out and occupy themselves *by* themselves. The room no longer has two subdivisions – the one for building materials and the one for dolls. It has many corner areas: the breakfast corner, the make-up corner, the crafts corner, the cooking corner, the experimental area, the book and play area, the sleeping corner and the painting area. Since the place will soon be quite crowded, teachers and children take over the hallways and entrance ways and move into the kitchen and storage rooms. In getting rid of the sleeping area, they *make* room for themselves. They even move outside.

What is outside? There are the elephants made of steel tubing, two seesaws and the sandbox. They now bring in shipping boxes, beer cases, old canvas and ropes, and build towers and tents. Also they lay out a vegetable patch for carrots, tomatoes and cress. Animals such as guinea pigs, rabbits, hamsters and white mice try to survive in their cages among the bustle of the children. Paintings are created on the asphalt in front and on the walls of the house. Parents come toward evening and grill with their kids. All of this takes place not in a well-to-do part of the town. These changes occur in a kindergarten whose children come from a section already classified as socially notorious.

SITUATIONAL APPROACH AS A FRAME OF REFERENCE FOR CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT AND KINDERGARTEN REFORM

In the following, a few requirements for curriculum development will be named, with orientation on the life situations of children. Later on, individual features of the approach will be explained in greater detail.

Prerequisites

As a pedagogical concept for kindergartens, 'situation-oriented learning' should be taken to mean the attempt to relate educational processes more strongly to the child's world, and to contribute through analysis of segments of the children's world to the legitimation of goals and contents of these educational processes. The focal points of learning and experience here are *not* reality as reconstructed by academic disciplines or specialised didactics. Instead, they are the reality of the lives of three to five-year-old children themselves – with all their questions, mysteries, contradictions, and problems.

Starting from the basis of their individual biographical development, educators should ensure that these children are given an opportunity to gain experience, enjoy possibilities of action, and make reflections which can contribute to their abilities to handle their life tasks themselves, with

all the insecurities, anxieties, and conflicts which this entails. Children should deal with these tasks in an autonomous and competent manner, thereby attaining enrichment in their lives through the overcoming of obstacles.

Accordingly, pedagogical goals should not be oriented along general educational patterns but start with the specific prerequisites and needs of the children in question. It is assumed, of course, that educational processes are intended to prepare for life situations and resulting changes. Form this, we can make an attempt to determine – through the analysis of selected situation segments – the conditions that are conducive to competent thinking and doing, and which lead toward individual and collective autonomy. Consequently, some of the conclusions which can be drawn concerning the organisation of learning processes and the development of curricula can be listed as follows:

(1) Since life situations of children are complex and decisively determined by actions of people other than themselves, it will seem neccesary to include *these others* as extensively as possible as collaborators into the learning and experiential processes of children. These roles of 'collaborators' include co-acting, co-learning, co-deciding and co-advising on an equivalent basis – all of which should be integrated as extensively as possible into the respective situations with the children involved.

(2) If learning should relate to complex life experiences, the kindergarten can no longer remain the sole locale for learning by the children. Such experiences are made *outside* the educational facility of the kindergarten – in the family, the neighbourhood and encounters with various social institutions. The kindergarten, therefore, as a place of learning should open itself to the outside world in a two-fold manner. Firstly, learning processes should, wherever possible, be transferred from the traditional, closed sites of learning to the real world where actual living and action generally take place. Secondly, at the same time, a whole range of life activities should be allowed into the kindergarten. This could be done, for example, by including persons who, in certain situations, can actively participate or by making available relevant information and material from real-life situations.

(3) The standard, rigid fixation of goals of learning applicable to *all* children must be replaced by the determination of suitable situations related to the real life of the children. This can take place, of course, in a concrete fashion only by the analysis of the specific situation of the individual children and groups involved.

(4) In order to determine which skills and abilities children should most rightly be allowed to develop, the social context must be taken into account. Naturally, the learning and applying of skills which

may be foreign to the social reference frame of a situation should be avoided.

(5) Questions on educational goals as well as the realisation of certain pedagogical activities should be discussed and implemented by those actually involved in the respective situations. The situation-oriented approach does not assume that there is only one pedagogical expert (the teacher) who can competently and alone make the proper decisions within the educational process.

Now, several of the eight features of the situational approach, as mentioned earlier on, will be explained here in greater detail. These are features with a two-fold function: they characterise the *frame of the curriculum development* as well as the *changes* made in the kindergartens.

Reference to Life Situations: Connection of Social and Fact-oriented Learning

Orientation to the life situations of children becomes significant at various levels. On the one hand, important life situations can be studied so as to reveal which qualities children should rightly to gain. On the other hand, situation stimuli represent important points of departure for educational work.

What, in fact, *are* significant situations? Firstly, they are situations children are presently experiencing as well as those which they will enter in the near future. Didactic elaboration of adult situations is not what is actually important here – although, to be sure, the life situations of children are strongly influenced by conditions under which adults live. A second criterion for choice of situations is that they should not be selected as ideally typical. To do so is to view all children alike. Instead, they should be situations that are real and comprehensible to the children in all their specific and distinctive elements involved. Finally, those situations can be said to be important and possibly be influenced within the context of educational work with three to five-year olds and with participating adults.

How can situational stimuli be understood? They can be identified at various levels. The children themselves can contribute experiences of immediate interest as well as questions and problems. These can be made the starting points for educational activity. Observations in the group of children, knowledge of predictable events or of past experiences which have not yet been fully dealt with and the teachers' own needs can all provide motivation to handle topics related to these situations. Parents and other adults are important sources of topics of their own life situations and experiences gained with children. The concept of 'situational stimulus' should by no means be limited to the immediately and consciously experienced events in the children's group.

What is meant by situation research and by situation analysis? Determining the qualities for life situations requires the teacher to gain insights into the particular structures, the background experiences, the relationships within the family and the social environments in which their children grow up. By means of on-the-spot research, talks with parents and other adults involved and other sources of information, kindergarten teachers can analyse the specific situations of their respective groups of children. Only by such a situational analysis can a competent decision be made as to just what preparatory qualifications children will require to enable them to face particular questions and problems.

The goal of situation-related learning implies that teachers will have to reflect on a responsibility which they have often neglected in previous years, namely, being responsible for the everyday reality of the child's world. Pedagogical stimuli, points of departure for role-playing, projects or conversations can therefore arise directly and in many and various ways. They can be taken with reference to daily experiences with older and younger children in the mixed age group, with television, playground, eating and sleeping. They can also relate to biographically significant events such as the separation of parents or the death of a grandfather. These are all incidents which can, after all, be taken over from the surroundings in which a kindergarten is placed.

The didactics of a kindergarten is therefore oriented less to areas of learning than is the case in primary schools. Specialised didactic elements can often be integrated into the social context involved. Some examples are as follows:

(1) If children are heating milk in the kindergarten and it boils over, this little accident can, if desired, be dramatised in the form of an exercise in bodily movement.
(2) When foreign and German families celebrate an international party in the kindergarten, this occasion can, for example, afford the possibility of incorporating related musical activities. It seems only logical to impart geographical knowledge when a German-Turkish group of children wants to learn something about the country of origin of the Turkish people – and not merely in an isolated intellectual context.
(3) First mathematical steps make sense when children go shopping during an excursion and need to deal with money.

This stronger connection between social-related and fact-related learning can help to avoid learning divorced from reality – learning which has widely lost all trace of justification. Situation-related learning could also be understood as one of the possible answers concerning the discussion on compensatory education – a topic which has always been academically treated in the past and without much consequences. Here,

a teacher would not likely be tempted to send the child of a labourer through a training programme separated from the child's prior world of reality as this leads to alienation. Instead, with situation-related learning, the teacher now has the opportunity in his or her supportive work of properly referring to and fully recognising the specific life experiences and qualifying predispositions of the children involved.

Learning in Groups of Mixed Ages

In the Federal Republic of Germany at the beginning of kindergarten reform, children's groups were often homogeneous in age. It was assumed that the development of the groups would be more readily promoted in such a way. One result of the reform movement, however, was to return to groups of mixed ages of three to five-year olds. Kindergarten teachers who have used situation-oriented approaches name the following advantages for working with groups of mixed ages:

(1) There is a favourable shift from learning processes strongly centred around the teacher to those focussed about the children's groups in which experiential processes take place reciprocally.
(2) There is greater correspondence in the complexity of life situations in which various age groups can participate and with equally complex and organisable learning experiences.
(3) One achieves the elimination of a hierarchical teaching/learning relationship in favour of an intricately structured system of communication within the group of children. This often occurs *without* the participation of adults – a phenomenon which promotes the self-regulatory and awareness processes in children.
(4) The possibility of forming small groups in which children with similar needs and interests, independent of ages, can undergo the experiences which they momentarily need.
(5) Finally, on an organisational level, there is an increased feasibility of undertaking projects outside the kindergarten where mutual responsibility among the children and a certain degree of independence within the subgroups are seen as absolutely necessary.

Participation of Parents and Other Adults

Another feature of reformed kindergartens which must be mentioned is the effort of many teachers to invite and motivate parents to participate in active pedagogical collaboration. This is a tricky task. Places of learning in Germany are traditionally more bounded off from parents than is the case, for example, in Anglo-American countries. In addition, parents have little time, especially when both hold a job. Nevertheless, one of the astonishing features of the preschool movement in Germany has been that the parents actually participate in numerous events in the kindergartens which include curriculum development. They make suggestions. A certain qualifying

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remark must, however, be made at this point: Long-term efforts are of course necessary before the collaboration of parents can become a regular and accepted fact.

All-day kindergartens can provide a good setting for parental collaboration. This also applies in cases in which teachers are willing to work with parents in unconventional ways. If this is the case, teacher-parent meetings will be more oriented toward education and planning matters. Parents initiate contacts, obtain materials and take part in projects, role playing, and excursions.

To take an example of parental collaboration, a group of parents discussed the kindergaten teacher's complaints about the trouble of 'blue Monday' with the children. On Mondays, children often appeared ill-balanced, irritable and quarrelsome. The parents involved here discussed the problems which occurred on weekends. The decision was made to spend a weekend together. They met the following Sunday at one of the fathers' trailer site outside town. Here, the children played harmoniously and mostly alone at a nearby creek while the parents occupied themselves with cards.

Two points appear especially important from experiences which have been gained to date from parental collaboration. Firstly, it has become clear that adult participation – precisely because it is life and action-oriented in the most successful examples – is not by any means restricted to certain socially and culturally privileged groups. Indeed, parents who would never attend a long-winded parent-teacher meeting somewhere will participate.

In cases of genuine collaboration, parents are neither teachers' aids (as they are in some American compensatory programmes) nor simply lookers-on who come to watch a performance once or twice a year. Ideally, they are well informed about the life situations of their children and they contribute their own experiences, these often being situations from their own lives.

Secondly, the pedagogical employment of situations can, in many cases, lead to initiatives on the parts of parents to influence a situation constructively. In carefully preparing children for a possible stay in a hospital – by visiting a doctor's office, with role playing on illness and treatment – parents and teachers can in fact positively alter a situation. An example is the insistence on the extension of visiting hours at the neighbourhood hospital. Teachers and nurses could also get together at the hospital ward to supplement the provision of toys. By such a method, learning means more than merely subjective preparation of the child. It can now also mean recognising a situation as changeable and taking the initiative. Of course, by no means is it successful in every case. However, it has been shown that people involved in this fashion have gained important insights even through *unsuccessful* attempts.

Reports have also shown the participation of adults other than the actual parents. Grandmothers came to play in the kindergarten. The boyfriend of a teacher came to play the dentist. Once, two Italian workers arrived to emplace concrete for a swing in the courtyard of the kindergarten. They not only let the children helped them but also prepared spaghetti for all of them during lunch time.

Dialogue with parents and other adults concerning the pedagogy of kindergarten includes an opportunity for mutual enlightenment and, in turn, for support and realisation of reform on the spot. For the kindergarten teachers, however, this also carries the obligation of taking the viewpoints and interpretations of their partners seriously and of providing fair treatment of the various and different opinions.

Transformation of the Relationship Between Those Teaching and Those Learning

The classic relationship between the older instructor and the younger pupil is no longer appropriate for learning processes which bridge generations. The great goal is that learning is not only for the young but for the old as well. The management of the daily and of not-so-everyday situations in life demands from all generations involved a mutual exchange of learning and of experience. It must not, of course, be denied that the experience of the older should be made available to the younger. In many cases, it cannot be disputed that the role of the teacher lies in providing impetus for new learning processes. However, if situation-related learning is in fact understood as a lifelong learning process, then it becomes clear that in mutual educational exchange, the older can also gain a wealth of experiences and insights. They can certainly be stimulated toward new processes of learning by those younger than they are and gain true assistance in their own further development. In this way, learning is no longer understood as a process in which a pedagogical 'expert' imparts precious knowledge. Learning becomes a process of mutually experiencing and communicating. Everyone involved learns and teaches – the teacher no longer plays the exclusive role of the expert.

Community-oriented Work

In several of the previous remarks and examples, a third feature of kindergarten work has hopefully become clear. This is orientation towards the community. Learning *for* life situations also means learning *in* life situations which includes fields of action outside the kindergarten. From such a viewpoint, it logically follows that projects should be executed to make learning locations in the community available to the kindergarten. This could be visiting a mother at work so that a group of children can attain insights into what parents do during the day. Another is a trip to a school to ease the transition from kindergarten to school or, as in the

example earlier on, an outing to the train station, accompanied by a Spanish father, to talk to departing foreign workers during the holiday season.

Today, kindergartens in Germany are trying to be more like a community centre – a feature that should be more strongly developed in the future. Their proximity to residential living encourages this. Supportive measures, however, are needed if kindergartens are to become centres in the community which offer possibilities for education and, at the same time, provide chances to spend one's leisure time profitably, thereby creating new original fields of endeavour for their work with the family. This aid will especially be required now in Germany in view of the declining birth rate and the threat of having to close down kindergartens. This community-oriented approach in the kindergarten can encounter opposition from those who are not really prepared to grant such aid. The self-organisation in a community is less well developed in Germany than in for example, the Anglo-Saxon countries. Local political encouragement, therefore, seems necessary to aid the forms of self-organisation and augment the readiness for citizen participation.

Open Planning

As in schools, rituals can be observed in kindergartens although often in concealed fashion. These rituals can gradually be relaxed in favour of open planning in which daily scheduling no longer takes place according to the classical pattern of free play. Instead, optional breakfast is offered, and free-play and project phases are mixed. Flexible planning is preferred to fixed weekly and monthly schedules. Topics, such as the seasons of the year or certain festivals which had priority until now retreat in favour of interwoven offers of games and projects. Materials are provided more from the environs of the kindergarten and less from commercial toy production. More items are home-made than bought.

During kindergarten reform, communication among the teachers in the various participating kindergartens is often improved. More team discussions and mutual visits take place and it has become more accepted to make preparations and perform evaluation together. The outlook that whatever happened in a kindergarten group will be the sole concern of one particular teacher has faded. As more co-operation is achieved *within* a kindergarten, the teachers find ways to organise advance training programmes which extend to inter-kindergarten level.

With advancement of the professionalisation of the kindergarten teacher's work, the self-image of these educators also undergo a transformation. Many reports and statements have testified to the fact that something like a revival of a feeling of purpose has taken place with regard to this branch of education. These newly confident teachers support the

objective of kindergarten in its new function as an educational institution with a real socio-pedagogical foundation.

The role perception of the kindergarten teacher has been freed from the earlier narrowness which was associated with insufficient understanding of the whole effort of preschool education. In comparison to a teacher in a normal school with specialisation perhaps in a particular subject, the role of the kindergarten teacher is far, far greater in scope. His or her area of competence is the world of the child and its parents. Here, social reality is not filtered through isolated fields of learning with each of them narrowly isolated from the other. In all cases, the kindergarten teacher plays the additional role of a social and community worker, for example. Despite his or her professionalism, the kindergarten teacher is always partly a layman. Indeed, no one who opens up such fields of action and who deals with all their modes of contradiction can be a person who has ready made solutions at hand. With increasing competence, however, it has been seen that growing self-assurance and self-confidence go hand in hand.

Indeed, teachers from model projects and experimental kindergartens report that it is now easier for them to put over their positions to kindergarten sponsors, parents or schoolteachers. Far more than before, they now show an active interest in political decisions in the area of preschool education. They also have better knowledge of the rights they have at their disposal. They have, furthermore, become more sensitive to the necessary framework conditions in their work through the study of new educational concepts. These kindergarten teachers can now articulate more strongly through a teachers' union which of these framework conditions are necessary for them to keep alive the kindergarten reform as well as to be able to implement it without intolerable stress.

EXPERIENCES WITH THE SITUATIONAL APPROACH IN NON-EUROPEAN COUNTRIES

The key situation identified by German kindergarten teachers reflects the German reality i.e. the reality of an industrialised land. Many of the educational ideas which are dominant in the work of reformed kindergartens would not be imaginable in a setting without the social developments prevailing in central Europe. The question is, however, whether the principles of the situational approach can in fact be identified in terms of universal validity. To recapitulate, several of these key principles as mentioned before are the orientation towards situations, participation of parents and laymen, opening of the kindergarten to the neighbourhood, deritualisation of everyday schedules and rejection of rigid training programmes.

Educators in developing countries and those in other countries with marked social contrasts and insufficient care provided for children of socially disadvantaged groups have successfully assimilated various elements of this approach. The reasons are:

(1) The situational approach can further the dismantling of certain forms of 'cultural invasion' suffered in the education sector and it can provide an alternative to this encroachment from the transfer of European or North American curricula. It provides a way to tie into key situations in the respective countries and enables their interpretation in terms of a kind of national pedagogy. It is actually liberating in a sense because it conceives of situations as not only challenges to be mastered but also, at the same time, as access in a certain way to concrete utopias as subjects of transformation.

(2) The situational approach can be viewed as a contribution to the decolonialisation of learning, in that its logic is capable of revealing patterns in colonial myths. It can, also aid in the reconstruction of situations of cultural identity of a particular nation, in the sense of 'critical-transitive consciousness' (Paulo Freire).

(3) The situational approach is an approach which is critical to institutions which implies, of course, a deschooling of traditional learning facilities. This feature can make room for a new concept of learning – one in which learning is taken as active participation in local and regional development.

(4) This approach can take socio-cultural minorities with their specific life environments into consideration.

(5) The situational approach features patterns of popular education and basic democracy. It is, after all, oriented towards activation and professionalisation of all those directly involved, including the laymen. It points towards a reform process with many aspects of a campaign and with the exclusion of any kinds of dominating aspects. It is, moreover, a low-cost programme, starting from very developmental work and reaching up towards the equipping of preschool institutions.

A reform movement oriented on this very approach may well start out with a few kindergartens and then reach out to embrace more and more institutions in the manner of a campaign. Some of the prerequisites for such a campaign are:

(1) The use of dialogue as a method. This means organising the development of a communicating process with the participation of as many teachers and parents as possible.

(2) The inclusion of the existing infrastructure at local and regional levels.

The steps of curriculum development consist of the following:

(1) Inquiries into the life environment of the children and the identification of key situations.
(2) Determination of situation-oriented educational goals.
(3) Development of educational stimuli.
(4) Documentation of the experiences gained in terms of curriculum units.
(5) Development of additional materials to professionalise kindergarten teachers. This would be aimed towards enabling them, for example, to work with parents, be involved in community efforts, obtain and produce didactic materials and plan educational work.

A major difference between Europe and the developing countries where educators have worked on adapting the situational approach lies in the area of insufficient care for the children of socio-economically weak population groups. 'Insufficient care' includes the phenomena such as economic distress of the families, inadequate housing conditions, unemployment of parents, absence of both parents who are at work, broken homes, improper nutrition and medical care, high infant mortality and child labour. The key situations identified by kindergarten teachers from such countries reflect these childhood conditions.

In Central and South America, situations have been identified which repeatedly reveal these as the basic problems and needs of children. They are also often in accordance with the views of the Brazilian educator, Paulo Freire. A few examples of key situations and themes of curriculum units named by Latin American kindergarten teachers which have been used are neglected children, child labour from an early age, begging, violence towards children, children alone at home, fragmented families, limited living space, illness and health, hunger and nutrition, traumatisation through war, and the influence of television and advertising. Also included are situations such as how discarded materials can be creatively utilised and how to find food outdoors.

An example of a kindergarten (or child day-care centre) learning unit is the survival situation. Korean teachers who work in the poor section of Seoul have evaluated 'getting lost in the city' as an especially significant situation. It can, indeed, be practically impossible for a child to find his way to safety without a good knowledge of the locality. Situations important to them which resemble those of their Latin American colleagues are proper nutrition, bodily hygiene, disease and treatment, and commercial advertising. Also important to them are situations of the reconstruction of national and cultural identity as regards to customs and habits, clothing, dances, songs and festivals. This all plays an important role in view of the invasions and cultural oppressions suffered over the history of their country.

REFORM AS A PROCESS

In the Federal Republic of Germany, kindergarten reform was not a smooth process. Following a period of economic prosperity with great importance attached to questions of education policy, we are now in a phase of economic difficulties. There are now other priorities than those of continuing educational reforms or securing the standards of preschool education. But, since teachers are important agents of the reform, many of them are still willing to continue and defend the reform, even without administrational support. So it has become a 'rolling reform,' a 'grassroots' movement and a largely self-organised process of educational innovation and experimentation. Since German kindergarten teachers are now largely left alone by the government without financial support, they are forced to make toys rather than buy them. They must learn to improvise and create landscapes for children with inexpensive materials. Now, more than before, they resemble their colleagues from developing countries in their manner of working. With regard to the development and reform of preschool education, an international exchange of experiences concerning these matters, at this time, seems more realistic and helpful than, say, the exchange of rigid research designs or standardised concepts of learning in early childhood.

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